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ABSTRACT

"Lifelong learning" often has the connotation of "lifelong schooling," an activity planned and organized by specialists for others. In contrast, "lifelong learning" can be understood as the description of a continuous life process, including not only formal and self-directed intentional learning, but also unintentional, but nevertheless important and effective learning. Adult educators must face the reality of this learning and widen their concept of learning. "Lifelong learning" should not, therefore, be used as an activist's banner for getting people into classes. Professionals in adult education should recognize that they cannot set themselves up as the "gurus" of learning, thereby making students dependent on them. Rather, adult educators must accept that learning is the students' business, and face the reality that all people learn lifelong, with or without educators and programs. This approach to the perception of learning offers a wider range of understanding and intervention. Reflecting on this wide concept of learning helps adult educators in formal settings to take off the professional blinders that focus their attention on the teaching activity through which they can impose their will, knowledge, or skill upon others. Observing thoroughly the learning of adults will lead to a truly mature "adult" education, a shift in emphasis from teaching to learning. (KC)

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Learning "en passant": The Forgotten Dimension

Presentation at the Conference of the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education
Hollywood, Florida
October 23, 1986

Summary

"Lifelong Learning" often has the connotation of "lifelong schooling": an activity planned and organized by specialists for others. In contrast here "lifelong learning" is understood as the description of a continuous life process, including not only formal and self-directed intentional learning, but also unintentional, but nevertheless important and effective learning. By focussing on this type of learning this presentation seeks to broaden the understanding of learning and asks about the consequences for the theory and practice of Adult Education.

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The Position

Adult Education often regards the adult as incomplete, deficient, lacking something. The consequence is that he has to be educated, trained, treated. "Adult educators in Britain have an unnatural appetite for classes and getting people into groups in their centres" (Cann in: Adult Education, Vol.57, 1984, p.47) - this describes the position certainly in many countries. Under this perspective "lifelong learning" is limited to schoollike arrangements and becomes a banner and program how "one human beeing imposes his will, or knowledge, or skill, upon another" (Kidd, How Adults learn, ©1977, p.13).

The following considerations of adult learning start from a different point of view: from the observation, that all adults already have a universe of knowledge and strategies at their disposal that enables them to live their lives in a complex and changing world. No matter which field we take under consideration - profession, family, leisure time, political, cultural, social behavior, valuing - we will find wide fields of knowledge, abilities, attitudes that are available and clearly do not come from any form of outside organized education. But where else does this knowledge, these skills, and even wisdom come from?

In the seventies adult education focussed on a new concept that views man as a self-directing organism. This new direction, often shortly described "from teaching to learning", was the basis for "self-directed learning", as proposed for example by Knowles, Rogers, Tough, Freire, Illich, Brookfield. But whether "self-directed

learning" was understood as a new method within formal education (sometimes supported by a "facilitator" who stimulates, guides, helps), or as a new dimension of learning that happens outside formal settings - still learning was seen as a deliberate, intentional activity. Tough's definition may be an example: "A learning project ... is ... defined as a series of related episodes, adding up to at least seven hours. In each episode, more than half of the person's total motivation is to gain and retain certain fairly clear knowledge and skill, or to produce some other lasting change in himself" (The Adult's Learning Project, 1979, p.7).

The self-directed learning movement certainly added significant perspectives to the perception and concept of learning. The learner is no longer seen as incompetent, as a person who missed something and should be treated. But also this type of learning can not explain all of the knowledge and skills people have.

Besides these described types of learning in schoollike settings and self-directed learning projects there exists another type of permanent, lifelong, daylong learning. I will tentatively call this "learning en passant"; it includes

(a) short learning situations,

(b) situations where less than half of the person's total motivation is on learning,

(c) contents that are not "clear" in the sense that the learner knows in advance what and how to use it or whether it will produce some lasting changes in himself.

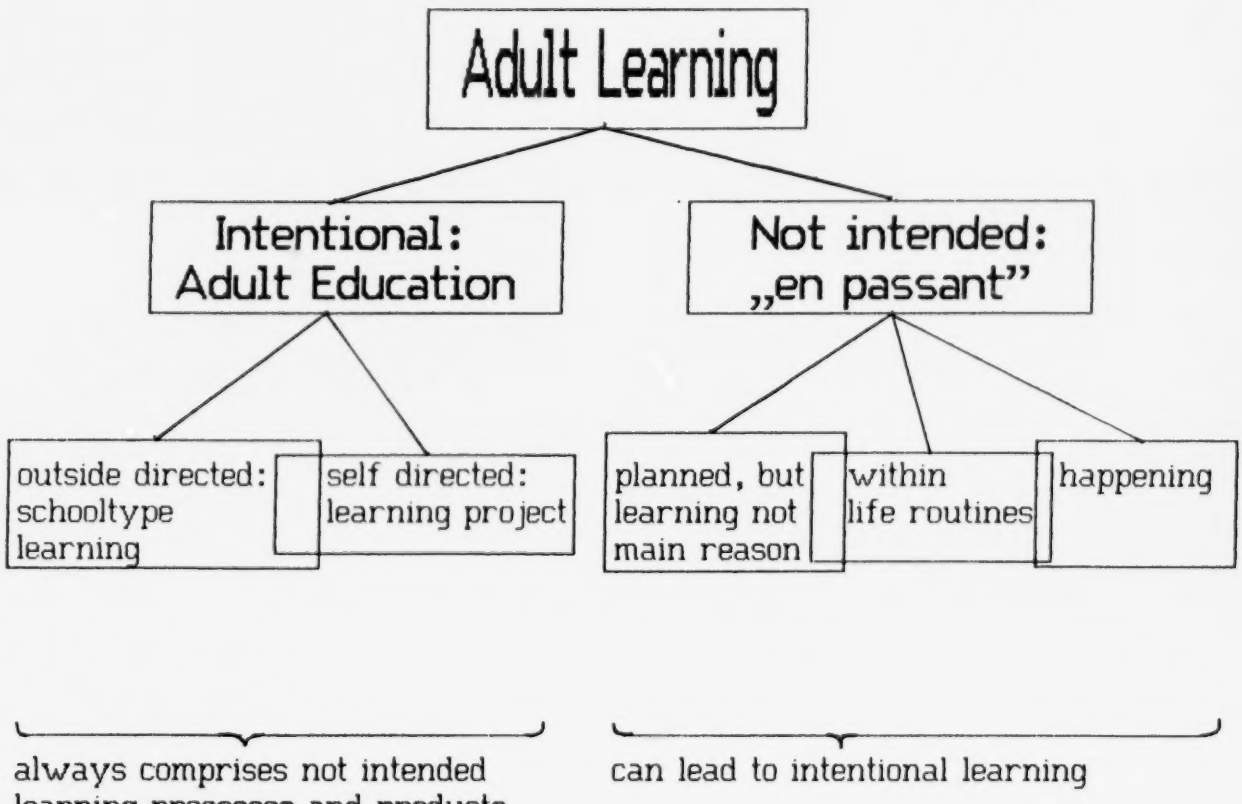
Forgotten, hidden

This type of learning is often forgotten - in theory and practice. So even key definitions of lifelong learning focus only on the intentional, doable, producible part of learning with the activities of planning, preparing, aiding. So for example Peterson: "Lifelong learning is a conceptual framework for conceiving, planning, implementing, and coordinating activities designed to facilitate learning by all Americans throughout their lifetimes" (Lifelong Learning in America, 1979, p.5). Or when Patricia Cross states: "Individuals living in today's world must be prepared to make learning a continuing lifelong activity" (Adults as Learners, 1982, p.ix). Kidd describes in the introductory chapter ("Learning Throughout Life") of "How Adults Learn" learning in an open, comprehensive way: "the learner opens up himself, he stretches himself, he reaches out, he incorporates new experience, he relates it to his previous experience, he reorganices this experience, he expresses or unfolds what is latent within him." But in the next sentence he is back to the intended, aided, produced type of learning: "The critical part of the process of teaching-learning is how the learner is aided to embark on this active, growing, changing, painfull, or exhilarating experience we call learning' (^{3}1977, p.14). And also Knowles' description of the learning process of adults (i.e. in The Adult Learner, ^{2}1978) includes general learning perspectives, but also finishes, how the andragogic teacher, the Human Resources Developer applies the theories to planned and intended learning. All this is good, necessary, helpful, often appropriate - but it is not everything: A wide and important field of learning is forgotten!

One reason for overlooking this dimension of learning may be that the mainstream of books about Adult Education is written by people who earn their money by making people learn how to make people learn. For this intention non-manipulatable learning seems of less significance. Another reason may be that this learning is hidden between other activities, unintentional, without clear objectives and settings. But nevertheless it happens continuously in life.

As a first result it seems important to me to point out, that "adult learning" and "lifelong learning" not only include intentional learning; it includes as well unintentional, hidden, small scale, incidental learning (see figure 1).

Figure 1: **The Fields of Lifelong Learning**


Adult Learning
Intentional: Adult Education
Not intended: „en passant"
outside directed: schooltype learning
self directed: learning project
planned, but learning not main reason
within life routines
happening
always comprises not intended learning processes and products
can lead to intentional learning

A method to identify this learning is to zoom down onto complex life situations and by this to dis-cover the learning aspects. For example:

Zoom 1: Flying USA

From the Conference Center in San Antonio I step over to McDonalds. Suddenly I stumble over lines in the pavement. There is a map of the USA in the ground - 80 feet wide. I try to find New York and stand there - looking to San Francisco. I cross the continent and read the names of the states. I "fly" back to San Antonio. Other people start smiling about me. I leave the place - wondering about the distances and the states and towns I crossed by plane without knowing it.

Zoom 2: Remember the Alamo!

I hear that some colleagues in a conference break walk to the Alamo. I have heard the name but I do not know really what it is. I have nothing better to do. So why not the Alamo? I participate in a guided tour. I drop out when I see in a corner a video-presentation of actors playing what happened there. I hurry back to the conference but return the next day to visit across the street a slide show (five projectors, beautiful effects and sound) about the history of the Alamo. On the last day I visit the gift shop and buy there postcards, souveniers.

Zoom 3: Conference

Conferences are organized for information. But experienced conferencers know: The real valuable output comes not from the big lectures, but from what happens "beside": meeting people, job market,

having a good time. Spread inbetween are information, experiences, that will be useful for more efficient behavior in the future (="learning"): A useful book or problem solutions in other projects are discovered, helpful persons, institutions, telefonenumbers are found, short discussions between chips and dips help to clarify specific questions, and - most important - "zero helpers" are identified: Great names without experience, specialists unable to deal with practical problems, books, media, programs not worth the material they are made of. So there is significant information not coming from the the educational main-program but happens "en passant" - from sunrise to sunset (and after), highly specific, individualized, and everybody can handle that.

Zoom 4: Pearl Harbour

To be honest: When landing in Honolulu I even did not know that Pearl Harbour is located on the Hawaiian-Islands. It was just a name I had heard in some history lessons. So my motivation to visit Pearl Harbour was rather extrinsic: #1 - A tourist has to visit specific landmarks. #2 - People at home looking at my slides would be impressed. #3 - As a well educated person you must not leave out such historical places. Again I was surprised to zoom easily on learning: I found a museum with pictures, models, descriptions, objects. And an impressive 20-minute movie with historical background information overcame the disadvantage of most historical places: that not much of the event is to be seen. A boat then takes us over to the USS Arizona memorial. People became quiet and I felt my heart when we stood before the marble wall with more than a thousand names killed here. On the way back I buy in the bookshop a reprint of the Honolulu Star from

December 12, 1941 with the headline: "War!"

Zoom 5: Cannery-Street

Two attractive hostesses wait for us in the entrance hall of Dole Pineapple Factory for the guided tour. Everything is well organized: At first everybody gets a brochure with pictures and explanations. Then we are guided between two lines on the ground through the factory. Posters give information, in addition to the hostess. And of course pineapple slices are offerd to test.

Zoom 6: Grand - this Canyon

We - eleven of my students of Adult Education and me - came just as tourists: without any learning intention. "Every word and picture ever made about the Grand Canyon is an understatement" - the truth of this word out of a tourist-brochure was stamped in our hearts the very first moment at the rim. But walking and looking there we found well prepared learning opportunities: The museum where we bought the postcards offered models, presented video tapes, sold information brochures. The rangers gave short explanations and answered questions. And at several places information was available on sign posts - "en passant".

It would be interesting to analyze each of the zooms in detail to find out what was learned and how this learning happened. Because of space reasons and because it may be more effective when the reader tries this himself I make a shortcut to general characteristics of this type of learning.

General Characteristics

These zooms illustrate general aspects of "learning en passant":

They make aware, that in coping with life-situations learning is always included, integrated. They show, that this learning is low compulsory and highly individualized: it can happen - or not, and different people learn different things from the same situation. This type of learning cannot be predicted in advance; there is nothing like a pre-pared curriculum; it only can be identified by looking back. Often this learning is wholistic; it includes not only knowledge, but also reality-handling, emotions, valuing. By being integrated into reasonable activities it is meaningful and useful in itself, which means that it is not merely stored for later use. It is successful without much effort (with increasing effort we move over by definition to self-directed or formal learning). It uses a wide variety of support (people, media, objects, institutions), educationally prepared as well as natural. Often it uses and continues and reactivates and builds on previous learning. The level of threat, stress, frustration is mostly low, or even a feeling of success, interest, thrill can be observed. This learning teaches answers as well as it opens questions when incorporating it into the set of experiences the person already has. All these situations can be used as a basis for further learning. And they can be a starting point for intentional learning.

Typology

The zooms also illustrate different types of unintentional learning:

Single event learning: Sometimes learning is initiated by a clear describable event (i.e. zoom 1, or car accident). By an outside event, not planned and not expected, something happens that makes old experiences obsolete and brings new perspectives into deliberation. These change-triggering situations can be accompanied by shock as well as with pleasure, the changes can be minimal to dramatic, the coping time can be seconds to years. But the triggering situation will later on be clearely identifiable.

Special activity learning: Sometimes a special activity (visiting a museum, taking a tourist trip, participating in a cultural, political, social activity) comprises learning results. These activities are more or less planned, intended, organized, and by these activities new information is found - more or less inevitable. The primary motivation is not to gain knowledge, but perhaps curiosity, or entertainment. In these situations it is not clear in advance that something would be learned or what would be learned. So often the main reason is perceived, but the learning segment remains hidden.

Mosaic stone Learning: All long term competencies in profession, family and other fields are composed of numberless learning events. Reading books, magazines, newspapers, watching TV, talking to colleagues, observing others and exchanging with whomsoever, form a universe of small scale learning experiences up to the gestalt and character and competency a person has available, represents, identifies with. Here we face the result of the wholeness of lifelong learning. The picture of a mosaic is appropriate in the sense, that an endless series of learning has formed up to the whole image. It makes

clear, that these stones do not swing around in random chaos but are incorporated and organized into a gestalt. This picture is not appropriate in the sense of a fix-preplanned or finishable task; on each stage it is all well finished as open for growth and change.

Consequences for Adult Education

The consequence definitely is not to leave out intentional learning in adult education: there is no doubt that learning "en passant" never would be sufficient to fullfil all learning needs. On the other side we should not overstress the necessity of intentional learning of adults in our society: A great portion of our adult population never uses formal courses, and also the descriptions of self-directed learning projects often sound nearer to "learning en passant" than to deliberate learning efforts. And even if professional adult educators do not like that truth: There are no clear indicators that proove that those persons using adult education live a life that is more round, satisfying, fullfilling than those who do not.

So here I see a first consequence for adult education: (#1) We have to face the reality, that all people learn lifelong - with or without educators and programs.

This consequence includes another: (#2) We have to widen our concept of learning. Learning is not only an activity related to specific educational enterprises but is a life strategy (as eating and breathing) that enables men to survive as individuals as well as a species.

In the consequence (#3) "lifelong learning" should not be used as an activists' banner for getting people into classes. It should be used to describe the all-encompassing process of learning, not to justify a program.

All professions tend to limit their field to phenomena they can manipulate, and by this mechanism they leave out the "full life". This is helpful for the professionals - it makes them important, necessary, admired. But by this they make their clients dependent on them and spoil their natural ability to cope with their lives themselves. This sort of professionalism is not helpful for the clients. So (#4) professionals in adult education should be aware of this unintended learning and decide thoroughly, what in a given situation would be the best for a learner: to do something, or perhaps to do nothing, or whatever inbetween.

That also prevents the "guru-"role, to play the big magician, who is expected to make elephants fly - which leads directly to hybris and burnout. To accept (#5) that learning is <u>their</u> business; and to know that basically they are able to cope whith that business clearely separates the responsibilities and helps to avoid the helper-syndrome.

To study unintentional, "en passant" learning (on a simple introspective way like in the zooms, or in a highly elaborate way like in biografic research) seems to me a great help to move students into the field of adult education. It offers a fresh approach to the field

that is not deformated or preformated by our school learning experiences. This approach (#6) raises the sensibility for and perception of learning and offers a wider range of understanding and interventions.

And here I am at the connection to intentional learning and learning/teaching. As here there is not the space to deal with that in depth I will focus only on one general aspect: Reflecting on this wide concept of learning helps adult educators also in formal settings to leave away the professional blinders that again and again focus our attention on the teaching activity, by wich even "self-directed learning" can be missused as a tricky way to impose our will, or knowledge, or skill, upon others.

When we observe thoroughly, with open eyes, ears, and hearts, the learning of our clients, this will lead us to a really grown up, "adult" education. And this is nothing else but a consequent ongoing into the direction we encounter in the development of adult education in the past two decades - "from teaching to learning".

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Handout

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Rationale

„Lifelong Learning" often has the connotation of „lifelong schooling": an activity planned and organized by specialists for others. In contrast here „lifelong learning" is understood as the description of a continuous life process, including not only formal and self-directed intentional learning, but also unintentional, but nevertheless important and effective learning. By focussing on this type of learning this presentation seeks to broaden the understanding of learning and asks about the consequences for the theory and practice of Adult Education.

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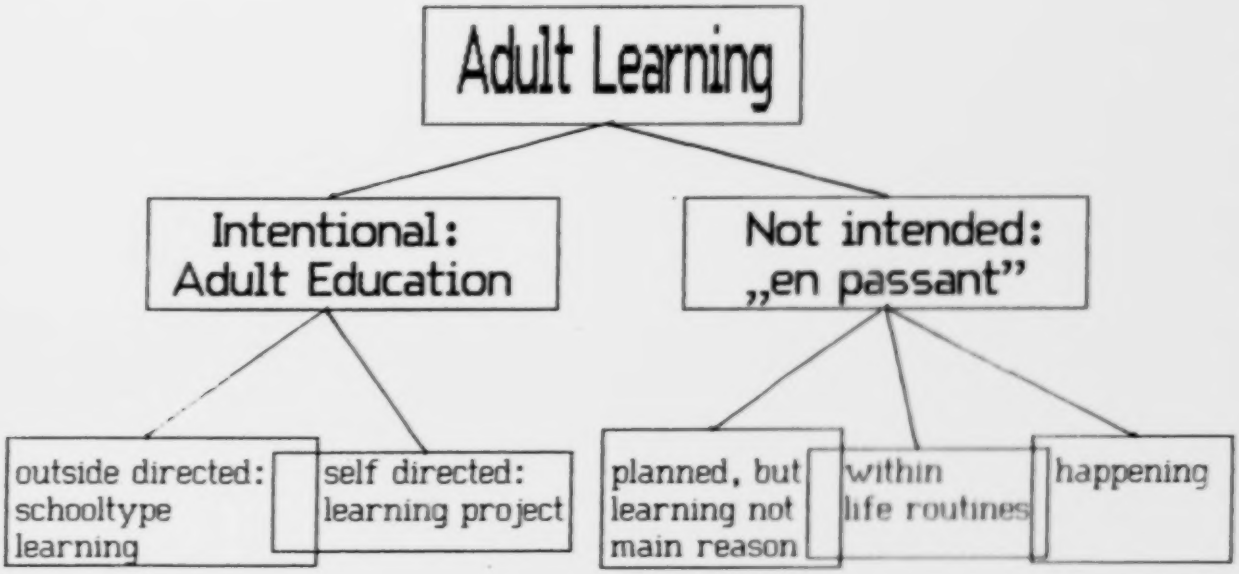
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